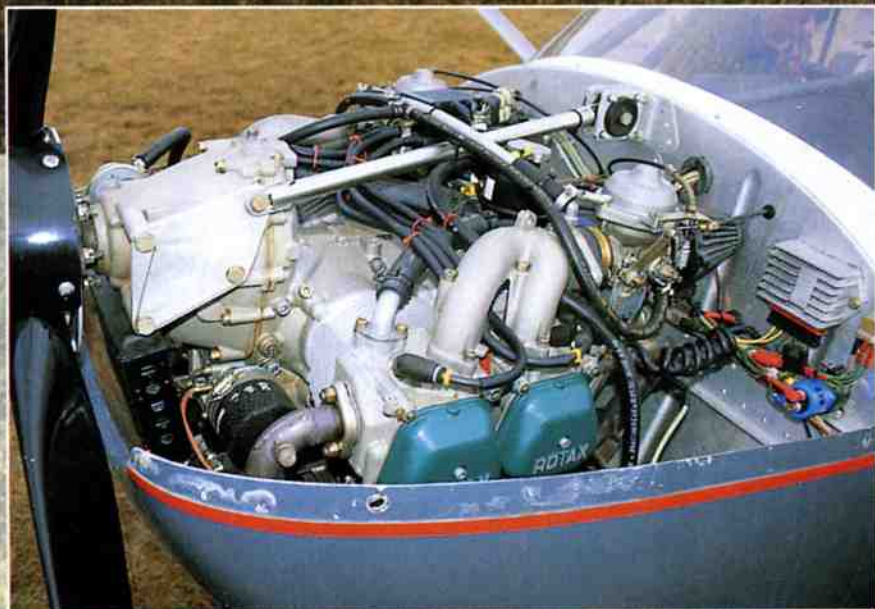


Testing the Foxbat

The Shape of Things to Come

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY PETER KRAUS



Top cowl off revealing the ubiquitous Rotax 912S.

I KNEW THE A22 Foxbat would be at the Queensland International Air Show at Bundaberg, so I arranged to meet Peter Harlow, the Australian distributor, and have a look at this new aircraft.

I had flown down to the airshow in the aero club's Grumman Tiger, a very nice representative of the era of general aviation which is now finishing. We builders of custom-built aircraft disparagingly refer to such aircraft as "Spam cans." This is not fair as these aircraft have taught, indeed are still



teaching, many of us to fly. Many are classics in their own right. But they are getting older, more expensive to maintain and, in many countries, subject to ever-increasing bureaucracy.

As I checked out the trade display area at the airshow, I had a great sense of optimism for the future of private aviation. Today's aircraft are lighter, more innovative, surprisingly well performing and above all, affordable. The trade-off is two seats instead of four, but I can't think of any other negative.

These new aircraft come in a variety of styles, some looking very futuristic in streamlined composite, some looking like snazzy small versions of the aircraft to which we have become accustomed, some all metal, some fabric covered. None is "better" than another, it's all a question of what you want to do. As we say in Oz, "There are horses for courses."

So where does the Foxbat fit into this brave new aviation world? Somewhere in between, really. Its

general outline, in common with aircraft like the Tecnam Echo, (see March 2002 issue) is conventional, but as is fitting in this silly age, it is "politically correct" in being so transparent. All jokes aside, this airplane has so many transparent plastic panels that it hides nothing. Its neat, sturdy structure is obvious. Your luggage is not on display as it is in an enclosed bin behind the seats.

The other side of this is superb visibility, to the extent that Harlow said that some people find it a bit

disconcerting at first. It is just the thing, though, for stock mustering and other farm and observation duties at the slow speeds at which this little plane excels.

Another feature of this new paradigm of aviation is where these aircraft originate. You and I have prob-



The seats are fixed but comfortable and accommodate a range of pilot sizes. Entry and exit is easy.

ably never previously heard of "Foxbat," but we have heard of Antonov, from the big old biplane through to the world's largest aircraft. The A22 Foxbat comes from the Antonov factory in Kiev in the Ukraine where it was conceived in 1995 by Yuri Yakovlev, by no means unfamiliar names. The prototype first flew in 1996, and the first production example has logged well over 1,000 hours in the United Arab Republic.

If you choose to buy it as a kit, it will come to you directly from the factory in Kiev. If you choose to have it as a factory-built aircraft, it will have been assembled in Germany.

Construction

Harlow had built his demonstrator from a kit, but painted and equipped it as a factory-built aircraft would be. He had never built an aircraft before and said it took him between 400 and 450 hours of assembly. No jigs are needed. The structure is all anodized aluminum. The wings are a D-box leading



This view demonstrates how the Foxbat is a "see-through" aircraft.

edge going back to an I-beam aluminum spar, with Stits covering behind the spar and on the control surfaces. The cockpit floor and other parts of the structure need riveting, but all the holes are pre-drilled to avoid error and save huge amounts of work, and the wings are framed up.

The fin and rudder and horizontal stab and elevator are separate, not all-flying surfaces. The cowl, wheelpants and tips are fiberglass. The doors are transparent and are bulged outwards so shoulder room is a huge 128 cm or just over 50 inches. Hip room is a little less, but there was a lot of room for us to sit comfortably side by side. The seats are comfortable and although not readily adjustable were fine for us both although Harlow is a good deal bigger than I. Harnesses are four point as standard. The doors are removable. I guess you would know if you took them off by the wind in your face.



Tail surfaces are separate. Note the wheel to stop the tail bumping when lifting the nose during ground handling.

Power is supplied by the now almost ubiquitous Rotax 912S of 100 horsepower with the 80-hp 912 as an option. There is an 11-gallon tank in each wing. Performance will vary depending on the propeller and how you set its pitch. Harlow has set his demonstrator for good STOL performance, which will give a climb of 1000 feet/minute and a



The control stick is substantial, but neat and comfortable in operation. The brake pedals are well made. Single brake on the stick works just fine. Note the Brauniger "glass cockpit" above the businesslike center console.

cruise of between 100 and 103.5 mph at 4800 rpm and just under 3 1/2 gallons/hour. He tells me that an owner in the UK pitched the same propeller to give a cruise of 110 mph at 4200 rpm and between 2 and 2 1/4 gallons/hour.

I had not immediately noticed, but the wings are swept forward slightly, helping achieve a wide c.g. range. What is noticeable is the quite large wheel partly enclosed in the



The magnificently efficient Kiev propeller. The curved blades add quietness.

tail. Bear in mind this is a nosewheel aircraft. This is because the c.g. is not far ahead of the mainwheels and it is very handy to lift the nose quite high in handling this very light aircraft on the ground.

So we strapped in to commit aviation. The single central stick is substantial and comfortable to hold. Surprisingly I have found that it does not worry me whether controls are yoke or stick, individual sticks or center stick. This one is available as a "Y" control stick as an option.

The instrument panel was neat and was equipped with a Brauniger "glass cockpit," or digital flight and engine management system. This is obviously of very good quality and has a lot of data available for display. I felt it was a bit slow scrolling through all the information but it's obviously one of those things you get used to and then appreciate the versatility. Throttles are beside you by the door, one for each pilot.

Test Flight

Ground handling during taxi was uneventful. We entered the runway and took off in a very short distance as expected. Harlow did not try for maximum climb in the circuit busy with others doing what we were before the airshow flying closed it down, but I still saw between 800 and 1000 feet/minute on the VSI part of the Brauniger panel.

The conditions were gusty with a strong wind but the little craft was quite stable and not in the least bit fazed. I tried some turns, to both right and left, and these were non-events. Very little up elevator needed and no bad habits. Because I prefer low-wing aircraft, I was pleased to note that the seating position in relation to the wing allowed good visibility in turns even after the wing was lowered, notwithstanding the slight forward sweep.



The cabin is uncluttered with an unnerving amount of visibility. The brake handle is on the center stick and ground handling is good.

Stalls, 27 knots with full flap, were very gentle with ailerons authoritative until quite late. As the stall approached, the wings wobbled a bit with a slight tendency to fall away toward whichever wing wobbled down, but all very gentle and no tendency to suddenly drop a wing. I believe it takes a lot of effort to get it to spin, although it can be done in a full-power stall and kicking rudder hard over. All told, Yakovlev has achieved his goal of an easy flying, safe STOL airplane.

A word about the propeller. Harlow's aircraft was fitted with a KievProp for which Harlow is also the agent. This is quite incredible in

its quietness, efficiency and low price and warrants a separate report.

Price, and Other Details

Price in Australia (at time of writing, one Aussie dollar was \$0.66 U.S.):

Type-accepted factory-built ultralight: \$AUD 75,000, including shipping, GST and three hours conversion training.

Airframe kit, including everything except engine, instruments, propeller, spinner, covering and paint: \$AUD 45,000.


Buying the kit won't save a lot of



This is truly a "see-through" airplane! Note the luggage holder behind the seats.

money unless you equip the aircraft differently. It will enable modifications and VH registration in the experimental category. Don't let the affordable price fool you. This is one well-finished, quality airplane.

The A22 Foxbat is type certified as a factory-built ultralight in Germany, type certified as an amateur-built kit in the UK and flies in the experimental category in the United States.

Empty weight is just under 600 lbs. and gross is 1102 lbs. 

For More Information

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